The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders

News Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, July 5, 2019
Exhibition examines the strange and mysterious roles of monsters in the Middle Ages

Cleveland (July 7, 2019) – Organized by The Morgan Library & Museum, ***Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders***—the first exhibition of its kind in North America—explores the complex social roles of monsters in the Middle Ages. Featuring about 60 illuminated manuscripts from the Morgan's renowned collection, the exhibition includes devotional, liturgical and secular works spanning the 800s to 1500s. Complementing these works are a selection of sculpture, prints and illuminated manuscripts from the CMA's superb collection of antiquities and medieval art. The exhibition prompts viewers to consider the function of monsters in medieval art, how they were received by their intended viewers and how they served as a way of engaging with the foreign, the unknown and the supernatural. ***Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*** is on view July 7 through October 6, 2019 in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Gallery.

From dragons, unicorns and other fabled beasts to hybrid creations combining wings, tails and limbs in inventive ways, medieval artists drew on an encyclopedic knowledge of monstrosities to fill the world around them. As divine lessons, monsters were thought to be signs of something gone awry in the social order. Unlike today's monsters, they were not made to frighten or entertain. Instead, medieval artists adapted their monsters to suit a variety of purposes—offering protection, criticizing authority, embodying social anxieties or giving shape to the unknown—forming an essential part of medieval culture. Some of the sumptuously decorated works on view were illuminated by notable artists such as Jean Poyer and Simon Bening, or belonged to, or associated with, well-known patrons including Henry VIII of England, Anne of Brittany, Yolande de Soissons and Catherine of Cleves.

"Visitors to *Medieval Monsters* will encounter creatures that will surprise, disconcert and delight with their inventiveness, bawdiness and beauty," said Heather Lemonedes, deputy director and chief curator. "We invite audiences to enjoy a rich array of illuminated manuscripts on loan from the Morgan Library & Museum, and to see works of art owned by the Cleveland Museum of Art in an entirely new context."

Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders leads viewers through three sections based on the ways monsters functioned in medieval societies. "**Terrors**" explores how monsters enhanced the power of the elites, be they rulers, knights or saints. A second section, "**Aliens**," demonstrates how marginalized groups in European societies—such as Jews, Muslims, women, the poor and the disabled—were further alienated by being depicted as monstrous. The final section, "**Wonders**," considers a group of strange beauties and frightful anomalies that populated the medieval world.

Whether employed in ornamental or contemplative settings, these beings were meant to inspire a sense of marvel and awe in their viewers.

For more information, exhibition highlights and images, please view the press kit [1].

Medieval Monsters is organized by The Morgan Library & Museum, New York. The curators of the exhibition at the Morgan are Joshua O'Driscoll, Assistant Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, the Morgan Library & Museum, Sherry Lindquist, Assistant Professor, Department of Art, Western Illinois University, and Asa Mittman, Professor, Department of Art and Art History, California State University, Chico.

Supporting Sponsor: Womens Council

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Complementary Programming

Gallery Talk: Medieval Monsters [2]
Tuesday, July 16, and September 17, noon
Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Gallery
Free; ticket required
Jennifer DePrizio, director of interpretation, leads a gallery discussion highlighting the ways in which monsters were used in the Middle Ages to instill fear, communicate morality, maintain power and explain natural phenomena.

Beast or Monster? Animals in the Medieval World [3]
Speaker: Elizabeth Morrison
Wednesday, August 14, 6 p.m.
Gartner Auditorium
Free; ticket required
Explore animals both real and imaginary in the Middle Ages with Elizabeth Morrison, senior curator of the department of manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum. Although Europeans in the medieval era were familiar with domesticated animals, exotic animals such as lions and elephants were largely known only through stories, books and images. Visualizations of these foreign creatures were irresistible and proliferated alongside depictions of unicorns, dragons and sirens—all thought to inhabit the far reaches of the earth. The bestiary, a kind of medieval animal encyclopedia, wove together these creatures as evidence of God's awesome creative powers; the creatures' appearances and behaviors were explained as reflections of Christian vices and virtues. Bestiaries also often discussed the so-called monstrous races, whose status as beasts or humans was a subject of endless debate.

Monsters, Nonsense and Wonder
Speaker: Sean Foley
Friday, August 23, 6 p.m.
Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Gallery

Free; ticket required
Contemporary artist Sean Foley explores the monstrous and grotesque in his painting practice. In this gallery talk, he will explore key works in *Medieval Monsters* through a prism of wonder. Using "nonsense" as a point of departure, Foley will encourage viewers to encounter monsters in a way that sparks their own imaginative inquiries and curiosity.

Open Studio
Sundays, 1–4 p.m.
Classrooms
Free
Drop into the make space for art activities inspired by *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*.

Special Exhibition Tours
July 17–September 29
Wednesday and Sunday, 2 p.m.
Free; ticket required
Join CMA volunteer docents for tours of *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*. Tours depart from the information desk in the atrium. Register online or by calling the ticket center at 216-421-7350.

Exhibition Catalogue

The accompanying exhibition catalogue, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*, features full-page reproductions of works in the exhibition; a foreword by Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum; a preface by China Miéville, award-winning fantasy fiction writer; and essays by Sherry C. M. Lindquist, co-curator of the exhibition and associate professor, Western Illinois University, and Asa Simon Mittman, co-curator of the exhibition and professor, California State University, Chico.

Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders can be purchased at the CMA store for $39.95.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [4].

Press Announcements [5]

Source URL: https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit/cleveland-museum-art-presents-medieval-monsters-terrors-aliens-wonders

Links

[1] https://www.dropbox.com/home/Medieval%20Monsters%20Press%20Kit

[2] http://clevelandart.org/events/lectures/gallery-talk-medieval-monsters

[3] http://clevelandart.org/events/lectures/beast-or-monster-animals-medieval-world

[4] https://www.clevelandart.org

[5] https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit